

NICOLAE SFETCU

**BLUE
STORIES**

Blue Stories

Nicolae Sfetcu

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The Retirement



Thomas. That's how everyone knew him. If you had asked any of his acquaintances which is his family name, he would have thought a little, and then he would have shrugged, powerless.

In the old days, when he was young, he was called Tom. He was hired at the heavy water plant as a mechanic, fresh graduate of the vocational school.

He grew up with the factory. As long as the construction of the plant continued, he worked side by side with the employers of the construction companies. He learned all the pipes, how to weld the stainless steel pipes in argon, how to grip the heat exchangers, and then how to mount the trays of the isotopic exchange columns so that they would be perfectly horizontal across the surface.

He was present every time Nicolae Ceausescu visited the factory, applauding him with enmity. He was cheerful all the time, ready to find a good word for each of his workmates, but at the same time retired and dedicated entirely to his work, which he loved immensely.

Even before the Revolution in December 1989, he married a girl he had been dating for two years, Helen, employed at the Shipyard. It had been a quiet wedding at the Crihală Forest restaurant, with his parents, Helen, and some of their colleagues.

During the Revolution in December 1989 he already had a daughter aged several months to take care of. That's why he did not get out on the streets in those days, he'd been free from the factory, to be with his little girl, to not get hurt in the madness that had gone out of the blue.

When started the actual output of heavy water, he asked to be moved to the main section of the plant, the isotopic exchange columns. It was the most dangerous place in the plant, but it was best paid there, and he needed money to support his family. His wife, Helen, was fired from Shipyard during the first mass restructuring, and was out of money after the end of the unemployment period, because she did not yet have the necessary retirement age.

They were still living with the little girl in a two-room apartment in a block where the construction workers had lived before 1989, during the communist era. During those days the workers did not care about the general condition of the block of flats, they knew that after a while they would leave this city, so that the walls jammed and smelled horribly at the house of the stairs from the wet basement filled with rats.

He refused every time to get into unemployment during every restructuring, not tempted by the financial compensation offered to those who left. He was convinced that the factory would never be closed. He just heard from everyone, and even said on television, that the heavy water produced here is the best in the world. He was proud of it, of the fact that he had even contributed to this national pride.

But the fall of 2015 came when the dismissal proved to be inevitable. He protested with the other colleagues of the plant, in front of the company headquarters, in front of the governing agency, and on the streets of the city, but he had nothing to do.

He only had five months old until he was able to retire, but he preferred to look for a job other than to stay with unemployment. It seemed to him that if he took unemployment benefit, it would have been as if he was begging. And, though he was poor, he had never borrowed from anyone.

He was lucky to have found a company that installed thermopanes that, when they saw how good he was, hired him on the spot with a good wage. Thomas was happy again.

But unfortunately, after a half-year of sparkling work at the thermopane, one morning when he was preparing to go to work, Thomas was sick. He had not felt very good all week. His wife took him to the County Hospital, to the emergency, supporting him all the way. There, after two hours of waiting, a bored nurse looked at him and decreed that there was something about eating, probably, to go home, rest, and the next day it would be like a new one. Helen took him back,

stopping from place to place to rest, and put him in bed. That's where Thomas lay for two days, feeling from bad to worse. They had to call for ambulance, which had reached in the evening to them. They hospitalized him, and after they made analyzes, they found out the terrible news: he had C hepatitis in an advanced stage. They gave him a prescription for treatment and sent him home, telling him there were no places in the hospital and there were more serious cases.

He found out from his former colleagues that many of those who had worked in the plant were sick with hepatitis. Some have even died of this. Some thought it was due to the unsterilized instrument of the factory dentist. Others, that the sulfated hydrogen was to blame, and that a doctor of labor medicine years ago was right when, after studies, concluded that hydrogen sulfide would have lethal effects over time on employees.

Helen borrowed money and took the prescription medication. After a week, Thomas felt better, but he could no more work, so he decided to retire. Now he was of the age. He gathered the workbook, the certificates from the plant, the copies of the other papers, put them all in the file, and went with them at the Retirement County Agency.

He barely managed to sneak in among the crowded people in the hall of the institution. He looked around disoriented. A big employer of the security company saw him hinderig the traffic at the entrance, and asked who he was looking for. He told him he wanted to file the pension papers. And so Thomas arrived at the office of the officer that checked the documents of those who filed for retirement. He went directly to the door, but the others waiting there still began to vocifer by pointing the queue. He understood and settled in good order. There were about 20 people in front of him.

After two hours of waiting, he felt the ground beneath his feet run away. He sat down on the bench beside him. After several other hours of waiting, he still had 10 people in front of him. He did not take up the papers on that day, because the officer closed the office at the end of the working hours, ignoring the protests of those who were waiting.

The next day he went to the institution at the first hour, decided to stay there until he filed the request for retirement. His turn came after about four hours. He went into the office and stopped in front of the officer. This one took the file, distracted, and told him that he was missing papers. He gave back the dossier to complete it.

After several days of going to various institutions and to the plant, Thomas returned with complete papers and the file was accepted. He was given a registration number, and he was told he would be notified in 2-3 months. He got out of there, relieved. Thomas was happy again.

But his medication, the food, the little girl, all cost more than they could afford. They had left behind with the payment to the tenants' association. They had to borrow from a company that gave them a loan based on the ID card only, but with a big interest. They were going to get rid of this loan after receiving his retirement approval and he would take the money for the previous months when the file was checking by the retirement agency. A skilled neighbor had made an account of him and told him he would take a pension almost as large as the salary he had received at the plant.

After three months of waiting, seeing that he did not receive any answer from the retirement agency, he went there and sat down again. He got in before closing. The official looked at the computer and told him his file was in the works. To come back in a month.

After six months in which he had received no response, Helen and Thomas were destroyed. The borrowed money had ended. They had arrived to wish the death of Helen's mother, who was alone in a neighboring city. They had not been to her for nearly a year, but at her age of 85, she was still able to take care of herself. They had put all hope in selling her house after she died.

He had to go weekly at the retirement agency, hoping that this way he would hurry to approve the retirement file. And anyway, there was warmer during the winter than in their apartment, where they did not have heat in the radiators for two years.

At the beginning of June, Thomas began to feel worse and could not get out of the house. Helen had resumed his way to the retirement agency. Each time she was in the queue, she greets the people there, they already knew each other.

On July 5, one day when the sun made a huge oven from the block of flats, Thomas, from the bed, asked Helen to bring him a cup of water. The water still flowed to the tap. Helen brought him water and sat on the edge of the bed beside him.

"Take care of the girl!"

That's all that Thomas could say. He died quietly, calmly, as he had been all his life.

Helen stayed on the bed looking at him. She had loved him from the first moment she saw him, for his way of being. She had lived beside him the most beautiful moments in her life. even if it had not been too much.

She did not even have the strength to cry anymore. It was good that she had sent the girl on holiday to her mother. She'll tell her later, but now she'd be tangled up.

He rose, sighing, took a candle he had at hand, lit it, and put it in a glass on a chair at Thomas head.

He then headed for the door to go to the neighbors to let them know of Thomas death when the doorbell sounded. He opened the door. On the threshold, the postman, with a radiating face, put out a stack of paper:

"Ready, Thomas has to get a beer, he received the retirement approval! Tell him that he can go to the retirement agency tomorrow!"

(10.08.2017)

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